



FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2020

Denmark

FREE

97

/100

<u>Political Rights</u>	40 /40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	57 /60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

97 /100 **Free**

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. See the methodology.



Overview

Denmark is a robust democracy with regular free and fair elections. Citizens enjoy full political rights, the government protects free expression and association, and the judiciary functions independently. However, Denmark has struggled to uphold fundamental freedoms for immigrants and other newcomers.

Key Developments in 2019

- The Social Democratic Party (SDP) became the largest in Parliament after an election in June; later that month, it formed a minority government with the backing of three parties in the so-called “Red Bloc.”
- The SDP government loosened some restrictions for refugees and asylum seekers during the year. It committed to participating in an UN-backed quota system for refugee resettlement in June, and committed to moving families of rejected asylum seekers to a less restrictive facility in November; In December, Parliament allowed for the return of children and adolescents who were removed from Denmark under the 2016 amendment to the Integration Law, even though their guardians had attained legal residence.
- In October, Parliament adopted legislation allowing the immigration minister to strip citizenship from dual citizens who fought for foreign extremist organizations, namely including the Islamic State (IS) militant group. Three dual citizens lost their Danish citizenship under the new law in December.

Political Rights

A. Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

4 / 4

The constitution retains a monarch, currently Queen Margrethe II, with mostly ceremonial duties. The monarch chooses the prime minister, usually the leader of the largest party or government coalition. Mette Frederiksen of the SDP was appointed by Queen Margrethe in June 2019, after that party emerged as Parliament's largest in an election earlier that month.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?

4/4

The 179 members of Denmark's unicameral Parliament (Folketinget) are elected to four-year terms through a system of modified proportional representation.

In the June 2019 parliamentary election, the SDP won 48 seats and 25.9 percent of the vote. The Liberal Party (Venstre) of former prime minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen won 43 seats with 23.4 percent of the vote. The populist and anti-immigration Danish People's Party (DF) lost over half of the seats it held in the 2015–19 parliament; in June 2019, it won 16 seats with 8.7 percent of the vote. The Social Liberal Party (SLP) won 16 seats with 8.6 percent of the vote. Another six parties won the remaining seats.

In late June, Frederiksen formed an SDP-led government with the support of the Red-Green Alliance, the Socialist People's Party (SF), and the SLP, which are affiliated with the left-leaning "Red Bloc." The election was considered free and fair, and the results were accepted by stakeholders and the public.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?

4/4

Robust electoral laws are upheld impartially by the various bodies tasked with implementation. In a May 2019 preelection assessment, Organization for Co-

operation in Europe (OSCE) monitors reported a high level of public confidence in Danish election laws and administration.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?

4/4

Numerous political parties compete freely.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?

4/4

The Danish political system is open to the rise of opposition parties through elections. In recent years, the most significant political ascent has been that of the DF, which supported the 2015–19 Liberal-led government.

The Nye Borgerlige (New Right) party was established in 2015 by former DF members, and espouses an anti-immigrant, anti-European Union (EU), and libertarian-leaning agenda. In June 2019, it won four parliamentary seats. Hard Line (Stram Kurs) was formed in 2017 and espouses an anti-Muslim agenda; founder Rasmus Paludan notably burned copies of the Koran during campaign events in 2019. Hard Line fell short of the two-percent popular-vote threshold to gain parliamentary representation in the June election.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?

4/4

Voters and political figures are generally free from undue influences by actors who are not democratically accountable.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, religious, gender, LGBT, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

4/4

The electoral laws guarantee universal suffrage for citizens, as well as representation in regional and municipal elections for permanent residents. Refugees and other immigrants may vote in municipal and regional elections after having obtained permanent residence at least three years before an election date. Women, LGBT+ people, and members of ethnic and religious minorities are active in political life.

The territories of Greenland and the Faroe Islands each have two representatives in Parliament. They also have their own elected institutions, which have power over almost all areas of governance, except foreign and financial policy.

C. Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?

4/4

Denmark's freely elected government is able to craft and implement policy. Danish governments most often control a minority of seats in Parliament, ruling with the aid of one or more supporting parties. Since 1909, no single party has held a majority of seats, helping to create a tradition of compromise.

C2 0-4 pts**Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?****4** / 4

Anticorruption laws and bodies are generally effective, and corruption is not considered an urgent problem in Denmark. However, in 2018, the Council of Europe's anticorruption body, GRECO, deemed Denmark noncompliant with its standards, citing deficient accountability mechanisms for the judiciary and for members of Parliament. The move came in the wake of a number of financial scandals involving public officials, as well as auditor reports suggesting misuse of EU subsidies.

In late 2018, a Danish social worker was arrested on suspicion of stealing as much as 117 million kroner (\$18 million) from Denmark's public welfare agency over a 25-year period; her trial was ongoing at the end of 2019. In December 2019, the National Audit Office warned that Defense Ministry employees made unauthorized and fictitious purchases using public funds over several years; two employees were subsequently reported to the police on suspicion of fraud.

C3 0-4 pts**Does the government operate with openness and transparency?****4** / 4

Government operations are generally transparent. However, the government has come under pressure to amend the Public Information Act to remove restrictions on certain information, including documents that are shared between ministers and their advisers. In August 2019, the Frederiksen government rejected parliamentary pressure to amend this legislation.

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?	4/4
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Domestic media reflect a wide variety of political opinions and are frequently critical of the government.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?	4/4
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Freedom of worship is legally protected. However, the Evangelical Lutheran Church is subsidized by the government as the official state religion. The faith is taught in public schools, though students may withdraw from religious classes with parental consent.

In 2015, a Danish citizen of Palestinian origin launched an attack on a freedom of expression event and then on a Copenhagen synagogue, killing several people. Since the attack, the government has provided security for Jewish religious and cultural facilities considered to be at risk of attack.

In 2018, a ban on the public wearing of face coverings—widely referred to as a “burqa ban” applicable to Muslim women—took effect. Between the end of August 2018 and June 2019, 39 people were charged with violating the ban; 23 of them wore Muslim face coverings.

In 2018, Parliament adopted a law requiring mandatory participation in a ceremony for confirmation of newly granted Danish citizenship, with guidelines including a requirement for shaking hands. The provision was viewed as a means of requiring

Muslims who refuse to touch someone of a different gender on religious grounds to adopt practices seen as “Danish.”

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?	4/4
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Academic freedom is generally respected.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?	4/4
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Private discussion is vibrant and unrestricted.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?	4/4
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The constitution provides for freedom of assembly, which is upheld in practice.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work?	4/4
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Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate freely in Denmark, and frequently inform policy debates.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?	4/4
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Workers are free to organize and bargain collectively.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?	4/4
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The judiciary is independent. Judges are formally appointed by the monarch but are recommended by the justice minister in consultation with the independent Judicial Appointments Council.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?	3/4
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Citizens enjoy full due-process rights. However, individuals who were denied asylum in Denmark, but whom the government is for various reasons unable to deport, may be subject to administrative measures parallel to those imposed on people with criminal convictions. For example, many such individuals live in isolated centers with poor facilities where they are subject to travel restrictions and have no legal option to challenge their placement. In 2017, the Danish Helsinki Committee criticized the conditions of the Kærshovedgård detention center for offering worse conditions than Danish prisons. In 2018, the Danish Ombudsman also called conditions at Kærshovedgård unsatisfactory.

In 2018, lawmakers approved funding for a controversial facility that would house 100 refused asylum seekers who completed prison sentences but could not be deported for fear of persecution in their home countries. The center was to be established on an island connected to the outside world via nonpublic ferry, but the Frederiksen government reversed the decision in June 2019. However, the government introduced strict restrictions on asylum seekers with criminal convictions, along with those who could not be deported for fear of persecution, that same month; those who do not comply with daily reporting obligations six times can be remanded into custody under the new rules, while 151 such violations were required before.

In October 2019, Parliament adopted legislation that would allow the immigration minister to strip citizenship from individuals who fight abroad for extremist groups, namely the IS; the minister only has the power to do so for those holding dual citizenship. In December, three dual citizens were stripped of their Danish citizenship under the new law.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?

4/4

People in Denmark are generally free from violent crime and physical abuse by state authorities.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

3/4

Danish immigration laws have long been some of the harshest in Europe, and immigration laws and asylum policies were previously tightened in response to the massive influx of refugees and asylum seekers entering Europe beginning in 2015. While Denmark recorded 21,000 asylum applications that year, the figure stood at 2,716 in 2019.

Families of rejected asylum seekers who cannot be deported have often been required to reside at a facility in Sjælsmark. Following an inspection visit in 2018, the Ombudsman expressed concern that the conditions for nearly 100 children, many of whom have stayed at the center for several years, put them at risk in terms of their healthy growth and development. The children of permanent residents have also faced the risk of deportation, even after guardians maintained legal residence in Denmark. A 2016 amendment to the Integration Law required strict integration assessments for children and adolescents seeking residency, and 83 individuals were subsequently removed from the country by 2019.

Denmark has loosened some restrictions for refugees and asylum seekers in 2019. In June, the SDP committed to accepting refugees under an UN-backed quota system in return for parliamentary support for its government. In November, the government declared that families living in Sjælsmark will be moved to a new, less restrictive, facility in 2020. In December, lawmakers amended existing legislation to allow children and adolescents who were previously removed under the Integration Law to return to Denmark and secure their own residency. However, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) criticized Denmark in an October report, noting that refugees lacked universal access to interpretation services while using Denmark's health system and that municipalities were not obligated to provide housing to refugees.

Discrimination, including based on gender identity or sexual orientation, is prohibited by law. As of 2017 identifying as transgender is no longer considered a mental disorder. However, procedures related to legally changing one's gender remain onerous.

The Greenlandic Inuit community faces social marginalization in Denmark, though the government has implemented programs to address this issue.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?

4/4

Freedom of movement is protected by law and generally respected by the government. However, in 2018, the previous Rasmussen government proposed an “antighetto” initiative, applicable to neighborhoods identified as having high unemployment and crime rates, and a high percentage of foreign-born residents. It aims to shift the areas’ demographics, institute daycare requirements for foreign children that would integrate them into Danish society through language and culture lessons, and enact stricter punishments for crimes committed there. Legislation to demolish certain housing structures to meet demographic quotas passed that November, and the daycare provision was approved that December. The Frederiksen government has continued these initiatives during 2019.

Since 2015, Denmark has enacted measures that restrict the movement of people who seek to join, or have joined, extremist groups abroad—notably the IS. Some of the measures have been criticized for having a low evidentiary threshold or for lacking appropriate oversight mechanisms.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?

4/4

Private business activity is free from undue influence by government officials or nonstate actors.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?

3/4

Refugees and other newcomers face lengthy waiting times for family reunification, including in cases involving small children, and restrictions on family reunification were tightened in the wake of the 2015 refugee crisis. The SDP, under pressure from partners in the Red Bloc, committed to loosening some restrictions in return for their support in forming the government in June 2019, and specifically committed to reviewing strict requirements for children seeking permanent residence in Denmark.

In 1989, Denmark became the first country in the world to adopt same-sex civil unions, and in 2012, Parliament overwhelmingly passed same-sex marriage legislation enabling couples to wed in the Lutheran state church of their choosing. Priests are not obligated to officiate but, when requested to do so, must find a colleague who will.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?

4/4

Public- and private-sector workers are generally free from exploitation by employers. However, migrants engaged in forced labor can be found in some sectors, including the agricultural and service industries. Women and children, also primarily migrants, can be found engaged in forced sex work. The government and NGOs work, frequently in conjunction, to identify and prevent human trafficking and to provide aid to survivors.



On Denmark

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Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

97/100 **Free***Other Years*

2019

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